

# **House Committee on Veterans' Affairs**

## **Statement of Hon. Madeleine Z. Bordallo, a Representative in Congress from the Territory of Guam**

Testimony Before the Full Committee  
of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

February 15, 2007

Mr. Chairman, Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee today to testify in support of legislation that would provide for full restoration of veterans benefits to surviving World War II veterans of the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines, the Philippine Scouts, and to those individuals from the Philippines who served in United States Armed Forces organized resistance units. As a member of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus and the United States-Philippines Friendship Caucus, I strongly support H.R. 760, the Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2007. I too commend you, Mr. Chairman, for championing during your distinguished service in this institution the restoration of benefits for Filipino veterans.

Spain ceded the Philippines, along with Guam and despite the Philippine Government having declared independence, to the United States through the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1898, the peace agreement that ended the Spanish-American War. The values of freedom, democratic governance and the rule of law were cherished and sought by the people of the Philippines in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The extent to which these values were inherent in the character of the people of the Philippines was evidenced by the service and sacrifice of the approximately 200,000 of their countrymen that, upon order of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, were inducted into the United States Armed Forces following the invasion of the Philippine Islands by the military forces of Imperial Japan in 1941.

These Filipino soldiers – who became known as the Philippine Scouts – served shoulder to shoulder with American servicemen fighting against the Imperial Japanese Forces. General Douglas MacArthur greatly valued the service of these Filipino soldiers. Their skills as reconnaissance men and guerilla fighters were displayed as General MacArthur ordered his forces to retreat to Bataan Peninsula

and nearby Corregidor Island. There the poorly-supplied American and Filipino troops, ably led by the Philippine Scouts, mounted a heroic, storied, but ultimately abortive defense against the well-equipped forces of Imperial Japan. Many American and Filipino soldiers were captured as a result of the fall of Bataan and Corregidor. Those captured were forced to endure the Bataan death march, confinement in concentration camps, forced labor, and imprisonment on ships. Those who escaped capture were organized into guerrilla bands to resist the Imperial Japanese occupation forces.

The Filipino soldiers' abilities and commitment to the United States were displayed again as General MacArthur, then supreme commander of Allied forces in the southwest Pacific, made good on his vow to return to the Philippines to help them liberate their country from Imperial Japanese Forces. The campaign to liberate the Philippines, which began in earnest in late 1944, reportedly included some of the bloodiest fighting of the Second World War. Filipino soldiers, throughout the course of that bloody struggle, fought shoulder to shoulder with and died along with United States servicemembers.

Conscripted Filipino soldiers were supposed to be entitled then to full veterans' benefits and they were so promised in the name of the good faith of the United States Government. Congress, however, withheld these benefits from them with the passage of the Rescission Acts of 1946. In 1990, many of these veterans were extended the opportunity to become United States citizens. Reportedly, nearly 24,000 veterans choose to do so. Full veterans' benefits, however, have never been extended to them. The enactment of H.R. 760 would correct this mistake and remedy this injustice.

The Congressional Research Service, in a January 10, 2006, report entitled, "The Republic of the Philippines: Background and U.S. Relations" states that approximately 30,000 of 200,000 Filipino veterans of the Second World War are still alive, of whom 7,000 reside in the United States. While estimates may vary what we do know to be fact today is that there are fewer and fewer surviving Filipino veterans of the Second World War with each passing year. The need for Congress to honor their service by enacting H.R. 760 is now more important than ever. If signed into law, H.R. 760 would fulfill our country's long overdue commitment to these loyal and honorable veterans. We must act now to fulfill the United States Government's responsibilities to those who served willingly and ably in the defense of freedom. Filipino veterans deserve no less than our best commitment to bring them equity and justice in the name of the good faith of the

United States Government.

I urge this Committee to favorably report your legislation Mr. Chairman to the full House as soon as possible. Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Buyer, and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to appear before you today to add my voice in support of this most worthy cause. It is a privilege and an honor to join our colleagues on this panel and to cosponsor H.R. 760.

---